

Arthur Reynolds and Melissa Clements, “Parental Involvement and Children’s School Success,” in Patrikakou et al., *School-Family Partnerships: Promoting the Social, Emotional, and Academic Growth of Children*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2005 (in press)

SUMMARY: This is a long-term study of the Chicago Parent Centers (ages 3-9). It documents a significant, even dramatic, positive relationship between parent participation in the program and social and academic outcomes for children. The longer parents took part in the program, and the more they were involved at school, the more likely their children were to complete high school, and the less likely they were to repeat a grade, be abused, be arrested, or require special education.

This study presents three categories of evidence on how parent involvement influences children’s success:

1. Interventions with a family support component positively affect student outcomes.
2. Parent involvement is a mechanism through which long-term effects of intervention are achieved.
3. Indicators of parent involvement are associated with higher levels of school performance.

The researchers define parent involvement broadly, and along three dimensions:

- behavior with or on behalf of children, at home or in school
- attitudes and beliefs about parenting or education
- expectations for children’s future.

The Chicago Longitudinal Study provides the data base for this study. It consists of 1539 low-income children, 93% African American, who took part in Chicago Child-Parent Center program (beginning in 1983-84) and a matched comparison group enrolled in an alternative kindergarten intervention. The study continued for 17 years.

Chicago Parent Centers (CPC) are a center-based, early intervention program that provides comprehensive education and family support services to low-income children and parents from preschool to early elementary school (ages 3-9). CPC operates through 23 centers across the city. CPC has five features:

1. Early intervention
2. Parent involvement
3. Structured language/basic skills learning
4. Health and social services
5. Program continuity between preschool and elementary school

The theory of change that underlies the study is that children’s readiness for school entry can be enriched through family support and language learning activities. Direct parent involvement in the CPC program is designed to enhance parent-child interactions, parent and child attachment to school, social support among parents, and children’s school readiness and social adjustment.

The program requires that parents take part a minimum of one-half day per week. They may choose among diverse opportunities, offered through a parent resource room staffed by parent resource teachers. The resource room features parent educational activities, interactions among

parents, and parent-child interactions. It also offers materials, supplies, speakers, and training. Additional options are GED classes, the School Advisory Council, classroom volunteering, and participation in school activities such as field trips.

1. Effects of the intervention on student outcomes

Preschool participation at ages 3 or 4 is associated with educational and social outcomes that span ages 5 to 22, continuing up to 18 years after the end of intervention. The longer the parents participated, the greater the results for children. Compared with children who participated for 1-4 years, children who participated from 4-6 years had higher reading and math achievement, and lower rates of special education, grade retention and child maltreatment.

Proportion of CPC Preschool and Comparison Children Achieving School and Social Competence (Participation 1-6 years)

| Child Outcomes | Age | Program Group | Comparison Group | Difference | Pct. Change |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| At/Above national norm on readiness | 5 | 46.7% | 25.1% | 21.6% | 86% |
| Child maltreatment | 4-17 | 5.0 | 10.3 | 5.3 | 51 |
| Repeated grade | 6-15 | 23.0 | 38.4 | 15.4 | 40 |
| Special education | 6-18 | 14.4 | 24.6 | 10.2 | 41 |
| Juvenile arrest | 10-18 | 16.9 | 25.1 | 8.2 | 33 |
| Completed HS | 18-22 | 65.7 | 54.5 | 11.2 | 21 |

The pattern of findings from this and other studies (e.g. Schweinhart and Weikart) is that early childhood programs with family support components are more likely to provide long-term benefits for children than programs without such components.

2. Parent Involvement as a Mechanism of Long-Term Effects

According to the study analysis, parent involvement is an intervening influence on children's outcomes. Reynolds and Clemens constructed an analytical model to measure the "value added" of parent involvement, as a proportion of the sum of all paths of influence on social competence behaviors. Participation in the CPC program contributed to children's motivation, cognitive ability, social adjustment, family support (i.e. parent involvement), and school support. These in turn contributed to social competence behaviors, such as school achievement, grade retention, special education, delinquency, participation in social services, and educational attainment (e.g. graduation rate).

The researchers estimate that the cost-benefit of the CPC program would yield seven dollars in savings to society for every dollar invested in the preschool component, through reductions in remedial education and criminal justice costs. About \$2 out of the \$7 can be attributed to the family support program. This estimate, they feel, is conservative, because parent involvement has synergistic effects with other program components. In other words, the whole program is more likely to be effective because of family support.

3. Indicators of Parent Involvement Predict Children's Learning and Development

A third measure in this study is the number of years between grades 1-6 that teachers rate parents' involvement in school as average or better. This provides a cumulative index of involvement that can be correlated to student outcomes. Both high school completion and juvenile arrest rates varied directly with teacher ratings of parent involvement. A one-year change in parent involvement was associated with a 16% increase in the odds of high school completion and a four-year change with increased odds of 48%

Juvenile Delinquency and High School Completion Rates, by Parent Involvement Rating

| Years Parent Involvement Rated average or above | Delinquency | High School Completion |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| 0 | 22.6% | 37.3% |
| 2 | 16.1 | 66.2 |
| 4 | 13.9 | 70.6 |
| 6 | 8.7 | 82.6 |

Conclusion and Recommendations

Reynolds and Clemons find that programs that provide child education and intensive resources for parent involvement yield greater and longer-lasting benefits than many efforts that consume a larger share of public spending, such as small class size, after-school programs, and dropout prevention. It is important, however that early education programs be high quality. Four elements are critical to the success of such programs:

1. A coordinated system of early care and education should span at least the first five years of life.
2. Preschool teachers should be trained and compensated well.
3. Educational content should respond to all children's learning needs, especially literacy.
4. Family services and parent involvement activities should be intensive and comprehensive.